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No. II.

COTTAGE ALLOTMENTS.

The Thanks of the Society were voted to Mr. GEORGE AIKIN, of Harlington, Bedfordshire, for the following communication.

As the system of making small allotments of land to the labouring poor is extending very much, and great good is found to result, not only to the poor themselves, but also to all those who are in any way interested, either as contributors to the parish rates, or in the quiet and orderly behaviour of the labouring classes ; it has been thought that it might be beneficial to relate what has been done in furtherance of this experiment in the parish of Toddington, in Bedfordshire.

This parish, as appears by the last census, contains 1,926 inhabitants, of which number 306 are employed in agriculture. In the year 1829-30, the poor's rates amounted to about 7s. 9d. per acre. In 1830-31, the rate was 8s. 3d. per acre ; and in the present year, 1831-32, it is calculated at about the same as the last.

In common with many other parishes, the quantity of agricultural labour has greatly exceeded the demand ; and, for want of a regular well-managed plan for employing the extra hands, they have been turned on the high roads, in gangs of twenty or thirty, not to work, but apparently to give them an opportunity of forming plans for midnight depredation. The consequence was, as might have been foreseen, a great demoralisation of the men, and an increase of the rates. Under these circumstances, W. T. C. Cooper,

Esq., the principal proprietor in the parish, resolved to make the experiment, whether this sad state of things might not be ameliorated by making *small allotments of land* to the labourers.

In November 1829, *six allotments* of half an acre each were made to six men well recommended for their good conduct, and having large families. The land is a free-working substantial gravel, and at the time was a wheat stubble: it was let as from the 29th September preceding; but as no profit could accrue to the people for the next half year, their rent was not to begin before the 25th of March following. It was not supposed that they would attempt to put in any wheat; however, they each, by one means or another, collected sufficient manure for a small part of their land, and sowed it with wheat; the rest of the land was in the spring set mostly with potatoes, with some peas, cabbages, turnips, scarlet beans, &c. The men took great pains, and kept their land very clean; they were repaid by good crops, which caused them to redouble their exertions to procure manure, so that the streets were cleared of whatever could be made convertible to that end. As a proof of the benefit derived, one of the men, having a very large family, and who had, heretofore, been obliged to go to the overseer for money to pay the rent of his cottage, was able to pay it himself—to his no small satisfaction.

This experiment appearing to succeed so well, the labourers generally were very importunate to have land also; accordingly, at Michaelmas 1830, a large field was divided amongst *forty-one* labourers, in pieces varying in size according to the ridges into which it was accustomed to be ploughed, giving the larger portions to those with the largest families. This land was of the same quality,

and was let upon the same terms as the former; but as it was for the most part extremely foul and out of condition, very little wheat was put in; and indeed it was apprehended in the spring that the men would hardly be able to get their potatoes in; but they turned to with hearty good will (*they were working for themselves*); and the farmers having ploughed the land for them in the autumn, they set most of it with potatoes, and some corn and vegetables: their crop of potatoes has been abundant, some of the lots having yielded from sixty to eighty and ninety bushels.

That the people receive benefit from these allotments, is evident from the labour they bestow, not only in getting out the twitch grass, and other weeds, but also from their *actually making good and substantial hollow drains*. It is further shewn by their good and orderly conduct. In summer evenings, instead of idly lounging about the place, or doing mischief, they are occupied about *their land*. It is a heart-cheering sight to see from forty to fifty persons, after their master's work is done, labouring upon *their own* little farms, weeding and clearing the crops till daylight fails, and then going quietly home, doubtless with the pleasing anticipation of their labour eventually making them independent of the parish, as their fathers, or rather their grandfathers, had been formerly.

In addition to the forty-seven allotments already spoken of, and two good gardens, thirty-four more pieces have been allotted this Michaelmas, making a total of eighty-three, which will nearly meet the demand. The land thus employed, as well as that of the whole parish, is tithe free; and it was thought advisable, instead of making a separate charge on each allotment to the parish rates, to include such rate, namely, about eight shillings

an acre, in the rent, which varies, according to the quality of the soil and other circumstances, from thirty-two to thirty-six shillings an acre.

The rules and terms upon which the land is held are very few and simple, and cannot be misunderstood or forgotten. In the first place, the rent is to be paid *punctually* on each quarter-day, under a penalty for default of immediate loss of land and crop on it: secondly, if any of the men are convicted before a magistrate of any breach of the law, the land and crop is, in like manner, forfeited: lastly, it is particularly insisted upon, that they shall be very watchful over the morals of their families, and regularly frequent some place of public worship; and especially that *the children be not permitted to be idling about the streets after nightfall*.

In granting the allotments, regard was, of course, had to the characters of the applicants; and those who were notoriously bad were objected to. This rule was all well enough to begin with; but, upon reflection, it was thought right to give those whose characters did not stand very well a chance of retrieving themselves: as one of them said, "I know, sir, that you have not a very good opinion of me; but give me *an opportunity of honestly employing my time*, and you shall see that my land shall be as well cultivated as the rest, and no fault shall be found with me in other matters." He has hitherto kept his word: he has hollow-drained his land, and bestowed as much labour and pains upon it as if it were his own freehold.

I may add, that the labourers all reside in the town or village of Toddingdon, and that the rents have been paid punctually on the day when they became due.

GEORGE AIKIN.